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Dear Planning Partner:

Today I am proud to announce that we are releasing the Draft Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Draft Plan) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Francis Marion National Forest. This Draft Plan will guide management activities on nearly 260,000 acres of National Forest System lands in South Carolina's Lowcountry for the next 10 to 15 years. It is the first Draft Plan and DEIS developed under the 2012 Planning Rule to be released anywhere in the country. I have enclosed a copy of the Draft Plan, DEIS and DEIS appendices on a compact disc for your convenience. You may also find these documents online at <http://bit.do/FMPlan>.

This plan has grown out of collaboration between national forest managers; federal, state and local agencies; conservation organizations; local communities; and others interested in the future of the Francis Marion. It establishes a strong commitment to an all-lands approach to conserve high priority forest ecosystems and landscapes in South Carolina. It also creates a framework for future decision-making and outlines a broad, general program for achieving desired conditions and objectives including:

1. Restore and manage longleaf pine within its historical range;
2. Suppress and eradicate non-native and invasive plants and pests;
3. Restore fire-adapted lands and reduce risk of wildfire impacts;
4. Protect and enhance water quality;
5. Protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife resources; and
6. Manage forests to mitigate and adapt to sea-level rise and urban development.

Publication of the DEIS Notice of Availability in the Federal Register (likely on August 14, 2015) initiates a 90-day comment period on both the plan and the DEIS. During this period, you may submit comments electronically at <http://bit.do/FMPlanComments> or by mail to Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, Francis Marion Plan Revision, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212. To view submitted comments, please visit our Public Reading Room at <http://bit.do/FMPlanReadingRoom>. If you wish to establish standing for the objection process, you must submit either electronic or hard copy written comments.

Highlights of the Draft Plan include:

1. Improve and restore longleaf pine ecosystems by converting, in the first decade, ~22,000 acres of loblolly pine to native longleaf pine and hardwoods, which are more resilient to extreme weather events and can sequester more carbon.
2. Maintain a diversity of tree ages (regeneration to old growth) to support a sustainable mix of ecological conditions across the landscape. The overall strategy includes establishing future old growth stands in all ecological systems with ~10% of each forest ecosystem in old growth conditions.



3. Protect species diversity, including nine Threatened and Endangered Species, by enhancing and maintaining species' habitat and ecosystem diversity. The Nature Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife Service and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources partnered with us to identify native ecological systems and species' needs throughout the planning process.
4. Restore historic fire regimes and reduce fuel loadings by increasing prescribed burning to an average of ~30,000 – 50,000 acres annually.
5. Maintain a steady flow of timber products through restoration and improving forest health.
6. Work with partners to achieve common goals (e.g., wildfire protection planning and access to the Francis Marion via trails and roads).

Future decisions on projects to implement the Draft Plan will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

To learn more about the Draft Plan, please join Francis Marion District Ranger Rhea Whalen and other plan revision team members at public meetings we plan to hold in October. Dates, locations and other details will be posted online at <http://bit.do/FMPlan>. You can also follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/scnfs](http://www.facebook.com/scnfs).

Thank you for your continued interest in the Francis Marion National Forest. We hope to see you at one of our meetings soon.

Sincerely,



JOHN RICHARD LINT  
Forest Supervisor